

## St. Charles Broadband Service Launch

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January 29, 2010

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## St. Charles, Virginia

I am pleased to return to St. Charles today to mark another major success in our effort to expand high-speed Internet services throughout Southwest Virginia.

Today, we formally launch the St. Charles community's new broadband service, a project which will enable residents to receive affordable, high-speed Internet services. Additionally, a new public Internet access site connected to the new broadband network has been established here at the St. Charles Community Computer Center.

More than fifteen years ago, I encouraged local governments throughout the Ninth District to find a means of deploying broadband networks so that affordable high-speed Internet access would be available to businesses and residents throughout our region. My goal in making this recommendation was to set our region apart in comparison to other rural areas of the nation, to make us more attractive than the typical rural region to industries looking to expand their operations into new locations, and to create technology-based jobs for Southwest Virginians.

Today, I am pleased to note that many of the communities in our region are making great strides in the deployment of broadband networks, and the new broadband services that begin today will mark another major step forward in our efforts to ensure high speed Internet access is available to residents throughout Southwest Virginia.

The broadband services now available in St. Charles have been established with the assistance of a grant of \$594,000 provided at my urging by the U.S. Department of Agriculture through its Rural Utilities Service's Community Connect broadband grant program. For the last several years, I have encouraged communities throughout our region to seek federal funds from this program. I am pleased to report that, as a result of these funds, three communities have received grants totaling more than \$2 million to build new broadband networks, which we will activate later this year. In addition, last year five communities have activated broadband networks with the assistance of nearly \$4 million in federal funds.

Today, we mark the launch another broadband network in the region, which will provide high speed Internet services to the St. Charles community. With assistance of the federal grant of \$594,000, residents and businesses in the St. Charles community now have access to high-speed Internet services. In addition, the St. Charles Community Computer Center, which opens today, has been established to provide free high speed Internet access to residents at convenient times.

The St. Charles Community Computer Center includes 10 new computer workstations outfitted with the latest computer equipment. The Center provides high-speed Internet services to residents six days a week. Additionally, the new Center provides free classes for those with limited computer experience on Tuesday afternoons at 2:00 PM and Thursday evenings at 7:00 PM.

With the benefit of the federal grant, LENOWISCO has deployed more than eight miles of fiber optic cable from its Internet backbone to the homes and businesses in St. Charles. The new services became available in the Summer, and already 35 homes and businesses have connected to the network.

In addition, high speed Internet services have been provided at no cost for the next two years to the St. Charles Rescue Squad, the St. Charles Fire Department, and the St. Charles Health Clinic as well as the Dental Clinic and Black Lung clinic. The new broadband service has also been provided to the St. Charles Elementary School.

Just as first canals, then railroads and then highways were the major arteries of commerce in earlier eras, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, access to broadband will be a defining feature of economic success for rural communities. Step by positive step our expanding broadband infrastructure is assuring that Southwest Virginia's communities will be at the center of economic opportunity.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize a number of individuals without whom the success we celebrate today would not have been possible.

I want to thank Skip Skinner, Executive Director of LENOWISCO, and his excellent staff for their outstanding efforts to expand the region's infrastructure.

I would also like to thank Paul Elswick, with Sunset Digital Communications, for his work to bring Internet services to the region.

Matt Taylor, with Taylor Industries, is managing the computer center for LENOWISCO, and he deserves our thanks today.

I would also like to thank Pauline Smith, resident of St. Charles, for her tireless efforts to see this project to completion.

The members of the St. Charles Town Council also deserve our recognition today for their continued support of this project.

I would like to thank the Virginia Tobacco Commission for providing matching funds in the amount of \$90,000 to assist with the project.

Finally, I would like to recognize Laura Lee my Deputy Chief of Staff for the work she has

performed for this project. I place a high priority in my office in obtaining successes much like the one we celebrate today, and Laura's work is vital to our efforts to deploy new broadband technology throughout Southwest Virginia.

The wireless broadband service now available in St. Charles is an example of what can be achieved when government officials at the local and federal levels work together and cooperate in aid of a common purpose. For that cooperation and successful work in providing high speed Internet service for the St. Charles community, I want to commend all here and offer special congratulations to the residents who are receiving this service.